

Sergio Figueiredo Ferretti

in memoriam (08/11/1937 - 23/05/2018)

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On May 23rd, 2018, the anthropologist Sergio Figueiredo Ferretti died of heart failure at the age of 80, in São Luís, in Maranhão state, Brazil. Ferretti, as he was known, graduated in History (UB/UFRJ 1962) and Museology (MHN/UniRio 1962), with specialization in the Sociology of Development (UCL Belgium 1964/66), a master's degree in Social Sciences - Anthropology (UFRN 1983) and a doctorate in Social Anthropology (USP 1991). Spanning 50 years, his career was dedicated to the study of religions of African origin and manifestations of popular culture in Maranhão, training several generations of researchers in the study of religions. Ferretti participated in the foundation of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Social Sciences at the Federal University of Maranhão, Brazil, and also had a strong presence and participation in official bodies related to culture in this state. He was known nationally and internationally for the studies produced with his wife, the anthropologist Mundicarmo da Rocha Ferretti. His main books – *Querebentã do Zomadônu. Etnografia da Casa das Minas do Maranhão* (1983) and *Repensando o Sincretismo: Estudo sobre a Casa das Minas* (1991), extend and advance beyond the works of Nunes Pereira, Roger Bastide and Pierre Verger on this Mina-Jeje house of worship in Maranhão.

On the occasion of his death, many fellow anthropologists and sociologists from various universities in Brazil wrote messages of condolences: Eliane O'Dwyer, Peter Fry, Miriam Grossi, Salette Barbosa, Antonio Mota, Antonio Carlos Souza Lima, Margarida Maria Moura, Mario Brasil, Maria José Aquino, Jane Beltrão, Emilia Pietrafesa de Godoy, José Ricardo Ramalho, Neide Esterci, Manuel Ferreira Filho and many others. The Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA) and the National Association of Graduate Studies in Social Sciences (ANPOCS) published eulogies on their websites and Facebook pages. Some colleagues, like Miriam Grossi, ABA's former president, stated in her message that Ferretti was one of the icons of Brazilian anthropology. Antonio Motta, ABA's current vice-president, mentioned the importance of the Afro-digital museum, founded by Ferretti, as well as the intelligent and generous intellectual dialogue he established with his peers.

Margarida Maria Moura, for her part, highlighted another of Ferretti's qualities: he had extreme respect for his peers, so much so that he once enrolled on a course about Franz Boas taught by Margarida at the Federal University of Maranhão. He sat down among the students as one of them, which moved her a lot. On that occasion, he took her to see the *terreiros*, which was how the Ferretti couple welcomed colleagues from various parts of Brazil and from other countries, always extremely generous and hospitable.

Among so many emotional messages, however, a phrase from Peter Fry struck me: he wrote that Ferretti was someone with his head and heart in the same place. His words expressed the integrity and wholeness of the trajectory of Ferretti who, indeed, loved what he did, completely devoted to his work, committed to his research and teaching and to UFMA as a knowledge-producing institution. At the university, where he was a professor for decades and subsequently emeritus professor, he never sought out administrative positions, preferring to dedicate himself to consolidating the institution's undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Social Sciences and Public Policies. Along with his wife Mundicarmo, he also maintained the Research Group on Religion and Popular Culture – GP Mina – one of the oldest anthropological research groups at UFMA.

Returning to the idea that Ferretti's head and heart were always in unison, I recall that from time to time when I taught an anthropology course, I would invited him to talk about the *Festa do Divino Espírito Santo*, preparing students for exercises outside the classroom. Once, I was late for five minutes, and when I arrived, he was already teaching! "You're late, I've already started," he told me, in his direct and rushed way. Ferretti had a sincerity that bordered on that of a child, and people nevertheless had no resentment, no matter how crude and even rude his observations or however nervous his manner.

On that day, in the classroom, someone asked what his religion was and he answered: "I reserve the right not to respond," but, immediately, he added: "If I were to choose a religion, I would choose mine." We return, then, to the aspect of Ferretti's trajectory so well highlighted by Peter Fry: integrity, unity of head and heart, communion, and affective identity with the religious groups and popular culture that he researched.

Ferretti chose to study discriminated minorities, collectivities subjected to religious intolerance, and groups often rendered invisible to the rest of society. Today it has become commonplace in Brazil to speak of the country's cultural and intangible heritage, and popular culture has become enjoyed and celebrated by other sections of the population. This was not always the case, though. Ferretti anticipated the whole movement, within anthropology, of studying manifestations nowadays treated as intangible heritage, including *bumba-meu-boi*, *tambor de crioula* and other manifestations of popular culture in Maranhão. He was ahead of the current concerns about recuperating African history, and his work precedes the discussions and policies surrounding affirmative actions implemented in Brazil such as quotas and social policies designed to address the social and economic inequalities faced by the country's African-Brazilian descendent populations. In the scope of the Federal University of Maranhão, Mundicarmo and Ferretti founded the Nucleus of Afro-Brazilian Studies back in the 1980s, Ferretti acting as its first coordinator, anticipating the movement of affirmation of the relations between Africa and Brazil.

Ferretti, however, did not limit himself to the study of African religions, but lived religious tolerance with his students, welcoming those who studied Catholic, Evangelical-Pentecostal and other religious manifestations, thus promoting true ecumenism in academic research practices.

Finally, I would also like to address this tribute to Mundicarmo da Rocha Ferretti. All of Ferretti's work was done with the support of his eternal companion in life and work. I vividly remember what was, I believe, one of the few occasions she was parted from him, when she attended a conference in another Brazilian state while Ferretti remained back in São Luís do Maranhão. She looked after him even from there, asking how he was driving in the traffic, while he expressed how much he was missing her. Mundicarmo was Ferretti's pillar, his staunch companion, and our tribute is also very much for her.

Maristela de Paula Andrade
São Luís, 05/23/2018

References

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